

## MEMORIAL

OF A COMMITTEE OF

### THE CORPORATION OF GEORGETOWN, D. C.,

SETTING FORTH

*Their objections to a bill introduced into the Senate, to authorize the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company to extend the Washington branch of their road across the Potomac river, at the site of the Long Bridge.*

MAY 4, 1860.—Ordered to lie on the table. Motion to print referred to the Committee on Printing.

MAY 7, 1860.—Report in favor of printing submitted, considered, and agreed to.

*To the honorable the Senate and House of Representatives  
of the United States in Congress assembled:*

The memorial of the undersigned, a committee appointed by the corporation of Georgetown to attend to its business before Congress, most respectfully represents that, on the 5th instant, a bill was introduced into the Senate to authorize the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company to extend the Washington branch of their road across the Potomac river, at the site of the Long bridge; which was referred to the Committee on the District of Columbia. At the first meeting of that honorable committee, four days thereafter, the mayor of Georgetown presented himself, and stated that said town was more deeply interested in that proposition than any other community whatever, and respectfully and urgently requested that we should be allowed a hearing upon the subject at any time that would be convenient to the committee. The Hon. A. G. Brown, chairman, informed the mayor that his request would be considered and the result made known to him. Shortly afterwards, he was told that the committee had declined to give us a hearing.

Under these circumstances, which were entirely beyond the control of your memorialists, they humbly pray to be allowed to state briefly to your honorable body the facts and reasons which they could have, at greater length and more satisfactorily, made known to the honorable Committee on the District of Columbia as the grounds of their objections to said bill.

Your memorialists are aware of the necessity which exists for a bridge over the Potomac river at some site within the District of Columbia, in order to secure an uninterrupted railway communication between the North and the South, and they would not presume to interpose an objection to a measure of such national importance. But we desire to make known to your honorable body, that we have the authority of two of the most distinguished civil engineers of this country, for saying that the proposed bridge can be erected at another point, where the public interests can be in all respects as readily subserved as at the site of the Long bridge, and without forever destroying the navigation of the river, so far as it is indispensable to the commerce of Georgetown.

The only alleged objection to that site is, that its route would be longer than that by the Long bridge, and would, correspondingly increase the time over which it would be traversed. But this objection falls to the ground when, under circumstances most favorable to the Long bridge route, the increase of time could not exceed the period of *six minutes*, as stated by Mr. Ellet; but, when the progress of the cars would be arrested by the raising of the draw to permit the passage of vessels, it would be hard to tell how often, and how much longer, that would be indeed, the longest as well as most dangerous and uncertain route. To this consideration may be added, the unavoidable occurrence of fatal accidents, to which passenger cars are always exposed when passing over a bridge with a draw, subject to constant derangement of its machinery, and the neglect and management of those to whose charge they may be committed.

We were opposed to the erection of the existing bridge in 1808; we made that opposition known to Congress by earnest and humble petitions, and by personal appeals to the members of both Houses. We opposed the building of that bridge because we apprehended serious injuries from it, and our apprehensions have been more than realized by regularly recurring disasters from that day to this; and your memorialists beg leave now to state with candor and brevity in what respects and to what extent we have been most grievously injured by the erection of the Potomac bridge.

*First.* It injures us by presenting such a barrier to the passage of vessels, that their owners and masters, residing abroad, will not come to our harbor for produce if it can be had at Alexandria, even at an additional price. That barrier presents both delays and injuries. During certain winds, tides, and currents, the contracted draw of that bridge cannot be approached or passed at all with safety. Hundreds of vessels have been more or less injured while passing through the draw, when every precaution had been taken to insure their safety. For these injuries no remuneration has ever been made, and for which no man, association, or body politic, seems to be responsible. I am now referring, of course, to casualties and disasters that occur during daylight. None but a madman would attempt to approach that draw during a disturbance of the elements at night.

*Secondly.* As already stated, we have always had to contend with our neighboring rival for a fair participation in a trade which was essential to our commercial existence. To do that, it was important

that we should be left in full possession of all our inherent rights and natural advantages. But it often happens that at a most important season of the year we are entirely deprived of the use of our river. *At the termination of our winters*, after the whole river had been closed by ice for weeks, and sometimes for months, it was exceedingly important to our merchants that the produce which had been accumulating on their hands should be shipped to distant markets at the earliest practicable period. Just as important was it to them that they should then receive their arrivals from abroad. But it has happened, time and again, that just at that critical time, when the ice had been entirely carried off from Washington city to the mouth of the river, the bridge intercepted its passage from our harbor, and our navigation has remained suspended for weeks, while Alexandria remained in the free and uninterrupted enjoyment of all the facilities that the river could at any time afford. This is no fiction, nor is it an evil of rare occurrence. During a late season, a vessel from the West Indies belonging to merchants of Georgetown, not being able to get higher up the river than the bridge, was obliged to remain at Alexandria for a considerable time, with serious loss and expense to her owners. It is worse even than that. In the event of a recurrence of severe weather, just at such junctures, it has happened that the ice became hardened and strengthened to such a degree that our harbor remained closed for weeks, while Alexandria was entirely free from the annoyance. But that is not all the injury which is inflicted upon us by the bridge, as an obstruction to the passage of the ice. It is only when the ice becomes suddenly broken up by a rushing flood, occasioned by melted snows and heavy rains, that we are made to feel the most frightful of the evils resulting from the obstruction presented by the bridge. On these occasions immense masses of ice lodge against its piers and become packed in a solid body from the bed of the river to the surface of the water. The great volume of water becomes thus obstructed and thrown back upon our wharves and all the houses and other valuable property contiguous to the river. In these seasons all business is suspended, and our people have plenty of time humbly to behold the progress of a desolation instituted for them by an act of the Congress of the United States.

*Thirdly.* The bridge, as you are aware, was originally constructed upon wooden piers, braced by heavy timbers, and placed from each other about thirty feet. Soon after its completion, it was found to produce accumulations of mud, from its site to a considerable distance towards our harbor, which gradually reduced the general depth of the water, and occasioned frequent and vexatious variations in the direction of our main channel, to the great detriment of its navigation. To such an extent and so rapidly were these deposits made in the bed of the river, that in a few years about one half of the stream, for some distance above the bridge, became a mere shoal of mud and hopelessly unnavigable. Then the wooden piers on that part of the ruined river were removed and substituted by a solid causeway, with stone walls on either side for its protection. In one respect, especially, this change in the construction of the bridge greatly aggravated the evil, and rendered it more than ever an intolerable nuisance. These great walls of stone not only intercepted the passage of the mud, and rapidly

increased it in our channel, but it presented an additional barrier to the current of the river during heavy floods, and increased the inundations already noticed.

It has often been stated that the bridge occasions a very unhealthy condition of the atmosphere, in certain seasons, in the neighborhoods adjacent to the shores of the river immediately west of the bridge. That fact has been flatly denied; and as it is a matter which does not very particularly concern the people of Georgetown, we will content ourselves with giving you the following extracts from speeches of senators of the highest character, viz:

The amendment upon which the debate arose was as follows, viz: "For repairs of the Long bridge across the Potomac a sum not exceeding \$12,000."

Mr. BADGER. "I hope the amendment will not be adopted. I told my friend from Illinois the other day, when he announced it, that I was decidedly opposed to it. I would much rather vote an appropriation of \$25,000 to remove that wretched and unsightly structure from the Potomac river than vote \$12,000 for the purpose of patching it up and keeping it in a condition in which it will continue to be an obstruction to the flow of that river. I do not agree with my friend that we ought to let this bridge stand until we get another. I think it far better to have none than the present one. I think it far better to have the river open. Why should we inflict upon Georgetown the inconvenience and loss of having the navigation obstructed? Why should we have this structure, a large portion of it a solid causeway, a total obstruction to the flow of the water, filling up the river with shoals that at low water are exposed to the sun, and must ultimately become a source of disease to the whole of that part of the city? It is an unsightly, injurious, and disgraceful nuisance, and I do not want to mend it at all."

Mr. BADGER proposed the following amendment: "For the removal of the remains of the bridge, \$18,000;" and then observed, "I desire to say a word or two on this subject, because I have some reason to believe that the importance of the removal of this structure is not fully appreciated by the members of the Senate. The accumulations that have been making by that bridge, which have been steadily increasing every year, have now got to such a pass that at low water every day a large surface, which is covered at high water, is exposed to the influence of this August sun. This has been going on for many years. As far back as 1841, when I was residing temporarily in this city, my attention was called to the effect of the bridge by one of the most intelligent men who has ever been here from a foreign country, Baron Marechal, then the representative of Austria here. He had no small experience on the subject, and he told me that if that thing was allowed to go on, yellow fever at Washington would be the necessary consequence. The health of the city is first in importance. All the members of Congress are obliged to spend a portion of every year here; and when we regard our own health and comfort, or the health and comfort of the people of this city, it is a matter of high consideration to maintain no establishment here that may even probably result in danger to either. Again, I am opposed to maintaining

the bridge, because it has been and is a serious obstruction to the commerce of that venerable city, Georgetown. Its citizens feel it to be so. Senators have lately had laid upon their tables a most earnest and respectful remonstrance of the entire population of that city, begging that the nuisance to them and the nuisance to us be put out of the way—may be removed. I sincerely trust that the Senate will concur in this view of the amendment, and that the appropriation will be for the removal of the nuisance, instead of perpetuating it forever, or for any time."

Mr. CLARKE, of Rhode Island. "My own impression is, that this bridge has a deleterious effect on the city of Washington. Its abutments have undoubtedly served to produce the deposits above it, creating, I suppose, a malaria injurious to the health of the city; and I have come to the conclusion that, instead of permanently rebuilding it at a great cost, it will be better to have a steam ferry there. It may be known, also, that there was a bridge some three miles above Georgetown, which was carried away by the same freshet that injured this bridge. The city of Georgetown has no means to build a bridge. They had a bridge; it has been carried away, and they desire to have another. I have no particular feeling on this subject, for I never was there more than half a dozen times in my life, and never expect to be again; but it seems to me that the city of Georgetown is equally entitled with Washington to the fostering care of this government. We hold jurisdiction over both equally, and there is no reason, in my mind, why all legislative appropriations should be made for the one and none for the other. I took some pains, Mr. President, as one of the Committee on the District of Columbia, to look at what I thought would be the best method of connecting the District with the Virginia shore, and came to the conclusion that it would be better to build the bridge across the Potomac at the city of Georgetown, a little above the aqueduct, where there are some rocks in the river, and connect the city of Georgetown with the Virginia shore; and then, in my opinion, it would be better to connect the city of Washington with the Virginia shore by a steam ferry-boat, than by the present bridge."

Mr. MASON, of Virginia. "What the Senator from North Carolina has in view strikes me as an object that must be attained one of these days by Congress. I presume there can be no question that, from the manner the present bridge has been constructed, it has done serious injury to the town of Georgetown. It is not only by causing the flats in the river, resulting from the deposits above, that it has impaired the health of the opposite part of the city, but it has so obstructed the channel as to do very serious injury to the commercial interests of Georgetown."

Mr. BRIGHT. "I do not believe that the Long bridge, so called, can ever be made a safe crossing point. But even admitting that I am in this incorrect, which I do not believe, there is one point in this District, one city in this District, one portion of the population of this District, which has been seriously injured by the erection and maintenance of this bridge. They have no representative here to speak for them; hence it is proper that those who understand the facts connected with this matter should present them to the Senate; and I was

greatly in hopes that the honorable Senator from Virginia, (Mr. MASON,) when he was up, would have gone on and stated the grievances which Georgetown, which lies entirely within the limits of this District, has suffered and is suffering. The people of Georgetown have, from time to time, complained of that structure as an interference with their commerce, and they have asked Congress frequently, and in the most respectful manner, to afford them some relief from these grievances—in short, to remove the nuisance. But Congress has thus far been deaf to their appeals. Latterly, by the act of God, a portion of the Long bridge has been swept away, and it is to be regretted that the whole of it was not taken.”

General SHIELDS. “I prefer that a bridge should be erected at Georgetown, and I hope that we shall be able to determine that one great bridge can be erected there, above navigation, that will answer all the purposes.”

Mr. PRATT. “One or two considerations have been advanced, about which I wish to say a word. The first proposition is, that the erection of the bridge has destroyed the trade of Georgetown in consequence of the obstruction it has caused in the river. Now, I believe no one can deny the fact that it is so. Many years ago I went to school in Georgetown, and at that time vessels almost of the largest class were able to ascend the river at that point and load with cargoes for every part of the world. At the present day it is impossible for vessels of that class to get up there. Georgetown has been a place of considerable trade, but from some cause or other that trade has been destroyed, and its inhabitants allege the erection of the bridge, and the consequent obstruction to the navigation, to be the cause. I have no doubt that is the fact.”

General SHIELDS, (chairman of the District Committee.) “As far as we have been able to make any inquiries in relation to this matter from many competent engineers, we have ascertained that if there is a new structure it must be placed in a new position. It must be placed in a new locality, near Georgetown; perhaps at Georgetown; perhaps near the aqueduct at Georgetown.”

Mr. UNDERWOOD. “I know that for the last fifteen or twenty years the city of Georgetown has been complaining bitterly of the destruction of the harbor at that place in consequence of the erection of that bridge, and that its citizens have preferred very heavy claims against Congress, and asked for remuneration for the injury done their commerce by putting up this bridge, which has destroyed their harbor. Now, if you intend to renew this bridge by rebuilding it or building another, you do the people of that city the injury to which they already complain. I think that, before you repair the old bridge or build another, something ought to be done in reference to the feeling of that people. The interests of the people ought to be consulted before you put an obstruction in the river which will destroy their harbor. I therefore wish that the committee who have charge of this subject would inquire into the present condition of our relations with respect to Georgetown, the injury of which the citizens complain, and what further injury they may receive by the repair of the old bridge or the building of a new one.”

Mr. GEYER. "The Senator from North Carolina informs me that the difference in the height of the water above and below the bridge, last spring, was four feet. The result is, that the water thus banked up enters the canal, and floods the whole of the little valley on the south side of the Avenue. This is a very serious evil, and may be of frequent occurrence. But it was not so much with a view to mention these facts that I arose to address the Senate. My principal object is to call the attention of the Senate to the fact that we are legislating for a people placed under disabilities by their position; and in that legislation we should take care that we do not injure them further than is necessary to subserve the public interests. We have erected a nuisance which has proved injurious to the health of both cities, the old and the new. Part of that nuisance has been swept away by a flood; and the question now before the Senate is, not whether that nuisance should be continued permanently—for it is admitted, by gentlemen who advocate this appropriation, that at no very distant day it must be removed—but whether it shall be continued some time longer? I ask if we have a right to inflict an injury on the present generation? Have we a right to expose those who are our wards, and who have no power themselves to act on this subject, to the evils which that bridge causes? I place this matter on the grounds of justice, and affirm that there is an obligation on the part of the government of the United States to remove the structure, as they have placed it there. I shall support, then, as the utility of the bridge is by no means correspondent to its evils, the proposition of the Senator from North Carolina, for the immediate removal of the remains of the bridge, as I am firmly convinced that its retention will prove most injurious to the health of the present generation."

Mr. SEWARD. "Before the question is taken, I wish to say one word for the purpose of justifying any apparent inconsistency in my votes. I do not know whether this question was taken by yeas and nays when a similar proposition was made in the deficiency bill; but if it was, I voted against the proposition which I shall now sustain. In doing so, I must say that I change my vote because I am satisfied, with the arguments which I have heard, that this bridge is a serious injury to the health and prosperity of the city of Georgetown, and unnecessary, in its present condition, to the interests of the people here."

Mr. BADGER. "One word now in regard to the people who are interested in this bridge. The people on the Virginia shore, below Alexandria, usually come up the river by boats. They do not drive up from Alexandria for the purpose of passing over it; and the people above Georgetown cross there. If I understand the matter correctly, therefore, there are only two or three farms lying between Georgetown and Alexandria who are interested in this matter."

On another occasion, the following remarks were made:

Mr. MASON. "I wish to say a single word in reference to the State of Virginia, which I represent here. My impressions are favorable to the railroads proposed to be benefited. Both propositions are that this road shall be done by private companies, and by those companies alone; and my disposition would be, wherever the public interest would admit



it, to give to those companies the largest liberty to construct ways for the public convenience. But I do not know how far the interest of the State which I represent may be effected by terminating the railroad at the point proposed by the amendment. I shall, therefore, vote against the amendment, with the knowledge that, although the Baltimore and Ohio Company has been operating its road for twenty years, this plan did not occur to them until an apparent rival interest started up in Virginia to make a railroad to cross the Potomac at a different point. I shall, therefore, vote against the amendment."

Mr. TOUCEY. "I am opposed to this amendment *in toto*. I am in favor of the legislation which has already taken place on the part of the Senate. I think it is due to the people of this District, both the inhabitants of Washington and the inhabitants of Georgetown, that the Senate should adhere to the bill as they passed it before. I ask a moment's attention. After we had provided that there should be a railroad from Alexandria, by way of Georgetown, without interfering with the navigation of the river, to connect with the Baltimore road at this depot, the Baltimore and Ohio Company steps in and proposes to extend a branch to the east of this Capitol, opposite to Alexandria, by which they will have the power of carrying all the freight and all the passengers down to a point upon the Potomac opposite Alexandria, and thus break up the legislation which was intended by the Senate, and which was intended in Virginia. I hold that it is due to the people of this District, as well as to the people of Virginia, that the railroad from Alexandria, by the way of Georgetown, to the depot in this city, should be carried out, and that we should not incorporate into the bill an amendment that will defeat it.

"Sir, I am in favor of that road for two or three considerations. In the first place, it is the shortest way, and by the route which is proposed by the bill as it passed the Senate, passengers can come from Alexandria to the depot in a shorter time than they can by any other way, because they are not interrupted by the passage of any ferry which requires slow movement. According to the celebrated engineer, whose report has been laid on our tables, it is the shortest route in point of time. In the second place, it is due the citizens of Georgetown. They are entitled to the accommodation of this road. Cars passing through to the South by way of Georgetown can take passage there, and can connect with the northern road by that route in less time than by any other, according to the report of the engineer. I am also in favor of it, because I desire to get rid of any obstruction in the river below Georgetown. Whether there will be a bridge across that river in any place, either below or here, whether it will ultimately lead to one or not, I do not know. I say I am utterly opposed to it. I think it is due to the citizens of Georgetown that the river should be kept open. I am opposed to closing up these great channels of communication which the God of nature has opened. I say they have a right to have the channel kept open, and not have it obstructed."

Your memorialists humbly beg leave to say, also, that the journals of the proceedings of Congress will show that within the last six years appropriations have been withheld for the repair of the Long bridge, and a proposition to allow it to be used for railway cars was decidedly



rejected. Within that period the Alexandria, Loudon, and Hampshire Railroad Company, and the corporate authorities and citizens of Georgetown, have nearly matured a scheme which will secure a railway communication from Georgetown to Alexandria by way of the Alexandria aqueduct, and which can be connected with the depot of the Washington branch of the Baltimore and Ohio railroad by means of the Avenue railroad, which, doubtless, will soon be constructed by some company chartered by Congress for that purpose.

But your memorialists perceive that the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company propose, not only to continue the infirm and dilapidated structure which has been cruelly and unjustly obstructing our commerce, inundating our wharves, and jeopardizing the health of the two cities for more than fifty years, but to erect another and similar bridge immediately along side of it. The bill of which we complain, not only gives that overshadowing monopoly the power to do that, but to put any other "*structure*" there which may, in their judgment, be "*suitable*" for their purpose. Thus are we to be committed, practically, on this absorbing question, of such vital importance to the unoffending and helpless people of Georgetown, to the legislative discretion of a gigantic and monopolizing corporation, whose instincts can never prompt it to give one moment's consideration to anything that may involve the rights or interest of the people of the District of Columbia.

As in all previous propositions to adopt the Long bridge site for a railway communication to the South, it is suggested that it will only be a temporary arrangement to meet the present exigencies, and that another and more suitable point can be selected for a permanent communication hereafter. But your memorialists can but most readily foresee that when the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company shall have, at great cost, made their local railways through the several streets named in the bill, and completed the yet more costly tunnel which they propose, besides having finished their bridge and the road from thence to Alexandria, they will hardly ever be willing to have it all recognized as a "temporary arrangement," subject, at any time, to be substituted by one which will better answer the public convenience, and less subversive of the rights and interests of the people of Georgetown. Their next proposition will be for the government of the United States to erect at its expense a huge and costly bridge to form a connecting link between the northern and southern roads. That company knows as well as other people that a railway communication could never be deemed safe and permanent which depends for a passage across the Potomac upon a frail and unsightly platform, which would be swept off by the first overwhelming flood which should descend the Potomac river.

Your memorialists, then, are sure that a permanent road on either side of the river, at that site, would involve eventually the erection of a bridge of imperishable materials, and on a scale of magnificence to correspond somewhat with the Capitol itself. Unless such an expensive spectacle be indispensable to the unity of metropolitan adornments, we pray to be delivered from it, as a ruinous obstruction to the commerce by which we desire to live. The corporation of Georgetown has just appropriated the sum of \$5,000, to be expended during the present

season in removing from our channel the deposits of mud which have recently been made by that Long bridge.

Your memorialists again beg leave, most humbly and respectfully, to remind your honorable body that the Potomac river has been already spanned by an imperishable structure, contiguous to the long bridge site, upon which another bridge can be erected by all the parties who have any interest in this matter, and which, without any additional obstruction of the river, can be made to afford the cheapest, safest, and most convenient accommodation for all traveling necessities whatever; and your humble memorialists, as American citizens, will ever fervently pray.

HENRY ADDISON,  
HUGH CAPERTON,  
E. M. LINTHICUM,  
JAMES A. MAGRUDER,  
ESAU PICKRELL,  
JUDSON MITCHELL,  
JOSHUA RILEY.

GEORGETOWN, D. C., *April*, 1860.